

To Relax You, Devices Apply Pressure to Points on the Skull

Sometimes Called Still Point Inducers, These Devices Are Designed to Be Used While Lying Down

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The Claim: Devices that apply pressure to certain points on the skull can create a deep sense of relaxation, help prevent migraines, aid sleep and ease chronic pain, say companies that sell the devices. Sometimes called still point inducers, these devices are placed under the head while lying down.

The Verdict: A small study found a device, in combination with soothing music, provided pain relief equivalent to a 10-minute massage. However, scientists say, the devices haven't been studied enough to know if they have positive effects.

The Still Point Inducer, currently \$16 from the Upledger Institute International Inc. of Palm Beach Gardens, Fla., is a piece of foam with two humps. Becalm Balls, \$30 from the Cranial Therapy Centre in Toronto, consists of two soft green balls on a string that can be adjusted for different-sized heads. Both are designed to go under the skull while a person is lying on a bed or floor.

A still point, as described by the companies, is a pause in the “cranial rhythm,” a pulsing that results from the fluid around the brain and spinal cord continuously increasing and decreasing in volume. The still point momentarily stops that rhythm, creating a deep relaxation, companies say.

The theory of a cranial rhythm isn't accepted by most doctors and scientists, and still-point devices haven't undergone rigorous testing, scientists say. “The evidence is not out there for these devices,” says Anne Jäkel, head of research at the European School of Osteopathy, Maidstone, U.K. Though, she says she jury-rigged a still-point device using a glass bottle and found it “very relaxing.”

Craniosacral therapy—popularized by the late John E. Upledger, who was an osteopathic physician and founder of the Upledger Institute—includes gentle pressure on the skull, or elsewhere in the body, aimed at inducing still points. The concept of a home device began with makeshift devices—originally two tennis balls tied together in a sock—intended to stimulate the relaxing pressure used by craniosa-



Becalm Balls from the Cranial Therapy Centre has a string that can be adjusted for each user.

cranial therapists, says John Matthew Upledger, chief executive of the institute and son of the founder.

The Still Point Inducer should be placed 2 or 3 inches above the junction of the skull and neck according to its instructions. The Becalm Balls are positioned directly behind the eyes, says Cranial Therapy Centre co-founder Robert Harris.

A study of 22 patients suffering from chronic pain found a 10-minute session with the Becalm Balls that included soothing music and a lavender aroma, reduced self-reported pain to 3.5 from 5.4 on a scale of zero to 10. The pain reduction was about equivalent to a control group that got a 10-minute massage by health-care workers with the music and aromatherapy. But the device has the advantage of being simple to use at home, says study co-author Carolyn S. Townsend, assistant professor at Indiana University Kokomo School of Nursing in Kokomo, Ind. The company didn't fund the study but gave Dr. Townsend a discount on the product.

The Still Point Inducer hasn't been tested in clinical trials but Boca Raton, Fla., physical therapist Mariann Sisco, who does training for the Upledger Institute, says her patients find it helpful in preventing migraines and improving sleep. She recommends patients start out using it for only 3 minutes at a time, and gradually increasing to 10 minutes, several times a day

The Becalm balls are soft and cushy, while the Still Point Inducer is firm and seemed to apply greater pressure. I found both devices very relaxing. Both only worked for me on a firm bed. On a soft bed, the devices sunk down too far and my neck felt unsupported on the floor. As each person's body is different, some people may get best results placing the device on a pillow or rolling a pillow under the neck, says the Cranial Therapy Centre's Mr. Harris.

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<http://www.wsj.com/articles/to-relax-you-devices-apply-pressure-to-points-in-the-neck-1416253237>